

Restore Us Again

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Let me invite you to turn in your Bible to Psalm 85, Psalm 85, it's on page 493 of the Church Bible, Psalm 85, and we'll read these words together.

Psalm 85, to the choir master, a psalm of the sons of Korah. Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation towards us. Will you be angry with us forever?

Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

[1 : 31] Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak.

For he will speak peace to his people, to his saints. But let them not turn back to folly. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Yes, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away.

Amen. Amen. Do you keep that prayer, that passage open in front of you? We'll pray appropriately, I think, at the beginning of a new year that God would speak to us.

[2 : 37] We need to hear from him, don't we? That's our most desperate need at the beginning of a new year. Let's pray that together. Gracious Father, we thank you that you do speak peace to us.

We thank you that the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, came and preached peace to those who were near and preached peace to those far away. Father, we thank you that we who were once far away and lost have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, preaching peace to us. And so at the beginning of this year, Lord, we pray that we would hear his voice afresh. Speak, Lord, for your servants, our listening.

We need to hear you speak today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. New year, new you.

New year, new you. That's the title of all those emails, isn't it, that you haven't opened from the gym and from the charity that you gave money to once and from the supermarket even.

[3 : 50] New year, new you. And their vision of the new you looks very much like someone who goes to their gym and volunteers for their charity and shops at their supermarket.

Funny that, isn't it? I know the plans I have for you. Says every single voice we hear. And so the question at the start of a new year, which I want to reflect with you on this morning, is which new you are you going to be?

If you're anything like me, you can't help but reflect on the year past and see things that need to change, things I do that I need to stop doing, things I don't do that I should start doing.

Where do you begin? It's important because here's the thing. What we decide needs to change will set the course for the kind of person we are going to become this year.

And before you say, I don't need to change anything, well, even if you don't change anything, you are still on a trajectory. You will become more like the person you are now.

[5 : 05] What kind of person will that be? What kind of person will you become? Someone who's even more busy, distracted, buried in their work than they are now.

Someone who eats better or less or more. Someone who struggles to keep up healthy friendships or invest in their family. Friends, Psalm 85 gives us a different vision for the kind of person we could

be this year.

And whatever else changes, it will be driven and directed by this change. Are we the kind of people who pray this prayer?

Restore us again, O God of our salvation. Will you not revive us again? Psalm 85 asks us on the first day of a new year, friends, are you going to be more prayerful, more repentant, more humble, more dependent on the Lord, and therefore more God glorifying and ultimately a more joyful person this year?

Is that the new year that you are going to be? Is that the person that you are becoming? And now thankfully, let me assure you, this isn't another resolution to add to the list.

[6 : 35] There's no God-given kind of 30-day spiritual fitness plan to turn your life around. It's simply a prayer for us to pray to God that he would turn us around.

Now that word turn or return, it comes up five times in the Psalm, and four out of those five times, it's something that God does. Verse one, he literally overturned the captivity of Jacob.

Verse three, he turned from his hot anger. So, verse four, his people pray, restore us or turn us again.

Verse six, will you not revive us again or return that reviving work? What good news today, friends, to know that it is God who turns our lives around, not us?

That word is used in verse eight of us. Let them not turn back to folly. But look what comes just before that in verse eight. He will speak peace to his people, to his saints.

[7 : 40] Brothers and sisters, the message of God's word to us this new year isn't turn your life around. It is turn to the Lord and ask him to turn your life around.

Turn your life back or more fully into his way. Everyone wants a piece of the new year this year. But the Lord wants you more fully.

More of you. All of you. And so I want us to spend a bit of time this morning learning how to pray this prayer, making this prayer our own together.

The psalm begins with a great reason for us to do that and to turn to him. Look back with confidence, it says. Just look back with me at verses one to three. What does the psalmist see looking back?

Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin.

[8 : 46] You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger. We don't know exactly when or what the psalmist has in mind, but he's probably riffing off of God's words in Exodus 34, shortly after God rescued his people from Egypt.

When he had overturned their captivity, he freed them from slavery, and they repaid him by making a statue of gold and calling it their God and crediting it with having rescued them from Egypt and slavery and worshiping it instead of God.

And in response to their thankless idolatry, God, in his hot anger, said that he would wipe them off the face of the earth.

He would utterly destroy them. And they could hardly complain about that given that they had just thrown his steadfast and everlasting love back in his face.

But instead, what did he do? He passed by Moses on the mountain and said, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

[10 : 15] And friends, the psalmist wants you to know that this is your God. This is our God. This is so typical of him, says the psalmist, to do this.

You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all of their sin. You turned from all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger.

You might spot, maybe you passed by it. We do, don't we? That little word, Selah. Do you see that in verse 2? The end of verse 2. Selah.

Now, your footnote says probably a musical or liturgical term. We're not sure. People suggest it could be maybe a pause for reflection. Or maybe the music would change to draw attention to what had been said or sung in the psalm.

Whatever it is, it's drawing our focus onto the words that come just before it. And look where it's placed. It's right in between two immense and incredible thoughts. See that?

[11 : 20] Thought one, God has forgiven all our sin. Wiped it clean. And thought two, God has turned his holy anger away from us and spared us his wrath.

And the psalmist says, don't rush on. Pause. Think about what you've just said, what you've just heard, what you've just sung about God.

He has dealt with all our sin. And he has dealt with his anger. In theological terms, he has expiated our sin and propitiated his anger.

Our sin is covered before him and his anger is satisfied towards us. And who did that?

Did we cover our sin? Did we satisfy his anger? No, the psalmist says to God, you covered all their sin. You turned from all your wrath.

[12 : 33] He did it. And the psalmist has reason to look back, doesn't he, and remember God's grace and his saving work.

Brothers and sisters, how much more reason, how much more confidence do we have sitting here today than to look back and see the grace of God and the saving work of Christ upon the cross.

He looks back to God's forgiveness in the Exodus and he says, that's just like you, God, to do that. How much more confidently might we look back at the cross and say, that's just like you, God.

That's just like you. When we were sinners, you loved us and gave your son to die for us. And we sang these words moments ago that actually echo the final few verses of this psalm and capture this so powerfully, don't they?

On the mount of crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide. Through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide.

[13 : 44] Grace and love like mighty rivers poured incessant from above. And heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

Amen. Perhaps as you look back at the past year, you see regret, things you wish that you hadn't done, choices you know that you shouldn't have made.

Instead, God invites us today to look back and instead to see his love and grace poured out incessantly towards us beyond measure, full and free.

Because he has covered all our sin by the death of his son and his blood has turned away his burning anger from us forever. and we say with the psalmist, that is so like you, Lord.

That is so like you. Friends, at the beginning of a new year, look back with confidence on the love and grace of the Lord in forgiving all our sin.

[14 : 59] And then turn boldly to him. That's our second point this morning. Turn boldly. He's looked back on God's grace to them in the past and them back then. Now, verse 4, he prays for the same grace to be shown to us now.

See that, verse 4, restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation towards us. And now that raises a question, doesn't it?

If God has turned away from his anger, why would he need to do that again? Is it that we need to repeatedly win back God's love or kind of constantly convince him to not be angry with us?

Well, no. Friends, no. That's happened once and for all. At the cross, all our sins were fully covered by Christ's death.

God's wrath was fully satisfied by his blood. If your trust is in Christ today, you are his and he is yours forever. So what then?

[16 : 05] Is this just an Old Testament thing? You know, like they had to go through those cycles of sin and forgiveness, but we don't? Well, again, I think the answer is no.

Like us, believers in the Old Testament knew they were God's people. They had security with him through his promises. They had his peace through Christ foreshadowed in the sacrifices.

So in what sense, then, is the psalmist praying, restore us again, revive us again? Well, I want to give us two lenses to look through to see what he's saying.

One kind of wide-angle lens and one sharp focus lens. Through the wide-angle lens, we see the church as a whole.

the global, the worldwide, or the Catholic with a small c church that we just spoke of in the creed. The global church throughout history and across the world is the bride of Christ.

[17 : 11] His people through the ages are united to him. He has promised and pledged and vowed his love to us and we are his. But like the psalmist, we can look back and see times where perhaps, perhaps our marriage was better.

The church is still his church, but in ages past, perhaps, perhaps his people have known a greater intimacy with him and a closeness with him and a joy in him and perhaps his forgiveness, his love, his mercy and grace have enveloped his people in ages past in a way that we feel today we lack. Tragically, we even see so many individual churches that used to belong to that marriage now sadly divorced from Christ. Another minister told me recently he counseled a couple going through a divorce and he said speaking to each of them it was as if they were speaking about two totally different marriages.

It's like that in many churches today up and down our land you can barely recognize the Jesus that they speak about. In places where he once would have been head of the household now he is persona non grata the church has walked out on him the marriage is over and where it's not where we where we know the Lord where we know that the Lord loves his church the church chosen by him loved by him from before the foundation of the world redeemed united to him we are his bride but it would be hard not to notice in Scotland at least that the marriage is not what it once was and the relevance and poignancy of that prayer then restore us again oh God of our salvation and put away your indignation towards us brothers and sisters let me add one prayer to your prayer diary this year

I don't know if you you have a list maybe that you pray through each week or maybe each month let me just add one prayer to that list pray that the Lord would have mercy on his church in our land his bride corporately we we his church have in so many ways in so many ways broken his covenant and provoked his anger and we are seeing that aren't we all around us in our city and shire the lampstands being snuffed out one by one by one you places where Christ has been worshipped for nearly a thousand years where now the worship services have stopped and the doors have been closed and locked there are lots of reasons why churches close but friends in so many cases when a church door bangs shut for the last time we are meant to hear God's gavel in heaven falling because in his indignation and in his judgment and in his holiness he has closed the doors of that church when we think of revival we tend to think of people becoming

[20 : 42] Christians don't we but think about it then it would just be called vival God giving life but revival that's God giving life back God giving life again to something that is alive but is sick or dying or ailing revival happens in a living church so could there be a better prayer for the church at the beginning of 2025 than the prayers in these verses restore us again oh God of our salvation put away your indignation towards us we pray those prayers not for one specific church not only for our church but for the church of Christ globally nationally and as members of the church of Jesus Christ in Scotland we identify with all his covenant people when we pray will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you let me add that prayer to your prayer list this year but now let's just swap lenses for our sharp focus lenses see ourselves personally in that picture because while there is a sense of kind of them back then and us now notice the psalmist prays restore us again revive us again this is personal too now we have union with Christ through faith we are his that there's a wonderful word in verse 8 that captures how deeply that's true in our translation it's saints he calls his people his saints the Hebrew word is chasid chasid which is a form of the word chasid which means steadfast or unending or covenant love so what he calls us tells us something about ourselves right the psalmist prays in verse 7 show us your chasid your steadfast love and the lord replies verse 8 you are my chasid my beloved my beloved that is our identity in Christ we are named by his love for us our union with him cannot be broken but beloved of Christ our communion with him can what it feels like to belong to him can change we can grow distant and cold to him we can experience his frustration his indignation verse 4 or his vexation it's not as strong a word as in verse 3 his burning anger that we will never experience but his displeasure his discipline we can and will he will never as the good shepherd drive us away from his flock but as the good shepherd with his rod and staff we will fill his crook around our neck pulling us back into right paths when we wander and we will feel him prodding us when we fall behind and I think the clearest test is in verse 6 of how do I know if I personally need reviving how do I know if this prayer is for me to be restored and renewed verse 6 will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you joy in the Lord joy in the Lord if that's what it feels like to be revived by the Lord let me ask do you need reviving how is your communion with

Christ how does it feel for you to walk with him day by day how do you experience him is it his frustration as you constantly provoke him or is it his joy as you constantly turn to him friends at the beginning of a new year let us turn boldly back to the Lord let this be the kind of person that you

become a person who prays these prayers from the heart revive us Lord restore us Lord because it is just like him isn't it it is just like him to forgive all our sins to put them away to wipe them clean to turn away his frustration he loves to do that the more we turn and say sorry to him the more we will experience his love and forgiveness and the closer we will grow to him and the more joy we will have in him

I gave you one prayer to pray regularly but friends make these prayers your own personal prayers daily restore me again oh God of my salvation revive me again that I may rejoice in you perhaps there are specific areas of your life that come to mind as I say this that you know you need renewing your personal devotions your inner life your thought life your attitude towards others I don't know but friends the truth is that we all need that renewal of our whole corrupt nature our whole heart is terribly sick with sin it's not one bit of me or one part of me that needs that renewing work it is all of me and so turn to him boldly and pray that prayer confidently to him knowing that he hears and that he answers this is our final point we do that we look forward then with certain hope certain hope and you've probably picked up consciously or unconsciously in our opening prayers on a

Sunday that there is always a confession of sin which is followed by an assurance of forgiveness and that comes straight from the Psalms verses 4 to 7 God's people repent they turn to him and now verse 8 we hear God's reply what does God say verse 8 let me hear what God the Lord will speak for he will speak peace to his people to his saints but let them not turn back to folly surely his salvation is near to those who fear him that glory may dwell in our land God's God's response to our turning to him is to speak peace to us notice not to make peace that's already happened or to offer peace as if we had lost it but to speak peace to assure us that we are reconciled to him that he is at peace with us it is a certainty with him that whenever we turn from our sin to him we will always meet with the assurance of his forgiveness in Christ and if we expect

God to forgive us and to restore us which we should well God expects us then not to go back so easily to what we've turned from he will speak peace to his people but let them not turn back to folly he says now that's not a condition of his forgiveness but friends it is a consequence of his forgiveness think about it if you say sorry for something and then go back to do it again say sorry go back and do it say sorry go back and do it without really even struggling with that or thinking anything of it well it says something doesn't it about what kind of relationship we think we have with God is he just the slot machine that we feed in sorries and he churns out forgiveness or is he the holy God he when he found us as hardened rebels loved us and made peace with us through the death of his one and only son so that he could wipe our sins from before his face and we could be his beloved bride in marriage we want to respond to forgiveness with change how much more in our relationship with God should that be true but friends that is a certain hope for us as certainly as he forgives you when you pray he will sanctify you when you turn you won't be finished unless you are with him but brothers and sisters by the end of this year you can be a more godly and more joyful person than you are now surely he says his salvation is with those who fear him that is his promise and on that note the psalmist ends with what one commentator

[30 : 20] Christopher Ash calls a cascade or a waterfall of blessing that flows from Christ on those who turn to him like this steadfast love and faithfulness meet righteousness and peace kiss each other faithfulness springs up from the ground righteousness looks down from the sky it's a selection box of some of the choicest words of the old testament steadfast love faithfulness peace righteousness colliding embracing kissing singing from the earth pouring from the sky it's a land and it's a people who are saturated and drowning in the covenant blessing of God and it ends like this friends to tell us that these blessings are not only found in the past but that God will answer these prayers for a return a restoration and a revival of his mercy and our joy and the fruit of those prayers will be his blessing as we have never known it before ultimately in a world of blessing a creation made new an earth of which

God can say again it is very good personal restoration now total restoration then both a certain hope and a promise from God and the best blessing of all is that he himself will dwell with us earlier we heard the words of John's gospel where John says of Jesus that the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory just like God pitched his tent among the tents of his people after the exodus so Jesus God the son has come not only to pitch his tent but to be born and to live with us as one of us his glory will dwell in the land says the psalmist we have seen his glory says John righteousness will make a path through his footsteps friends his righteous steps on this

earth give us hope again for the future so brothers and sisters at the start of a new year which new year are you going to be will you be the kind of person who turns to the Lord and prays these prayers my hope my prayer is that we together are a church that can be marked by the psalm we together are a church that prays this prayer that this is our prayer and my hope is that it is your prayer to you let's look back with confidence let's turn boldly to the Lord and look forward with certain hope for I know the plans I have for you says the Lord plans for peace and not for evil to give you a future and a hope then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your hearts I will be found by you declares the Lord and I will restore you let's pray for that together now let's pray gracious father how deep is your love for us how vast beyond all measure that you have wiped away all of our sin and turned away your wrath from us by sending your one and only son to bear it in our place Lord we are humbled and in awe before you this morning and father we pray that by your holy spirit that would spur us to turn back to you again and not to ever stop turning to you that we would be assured of your forgiveness and that we would be confident of your grace because we rest upon the promise of your word that when we turn to you you will have mercy upon us so father we soften our hearts that you would take away the distractions that you would show that the things and the desires of this world for what they truly are that they are passing pleasures but our joy is in you and so we pray Lord that we would have that joy again and you would revive us restore us oh Lord we pray Lord together and for each other that we would arrive at the year more like Jesus that we would see that in each other that we would see that in our church and that it would bring pleasure to you that we would know your blessing because we are united with him this we pray in his name amen